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### A Letter of Sebastian Viscaino.

[A translation of a photo-lithograph of the original on file at Madrid, made for Adolph Sutro, Esq., and presented to the society by Rev. J. Adam, January 7, 1889.]

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BY GEORGE BUTLER GRIFFIN.

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THIS is this the letter which General Sebastian Viscaino sent from the harbor of Monterey, where his vessels lay at anchor for several days. In this letter he says that two vessels were furnished for the expedition, but in point of fact he had three when he left Acapulco, and entered Monterey bay with that number. One of these he dispatched for Acapulco for the purpose of reporting progress, and continued on his voyage after a rest of eighteen days in port. He arrived at Monterey bay on the 16th of December, 1602; and this letter bears date the 28th of that month. On sailing to the northward the flag-ship reached a point somewhere beyond the bay of San Francisco. The vessels parted company and the smaller one, sailing northward still, went as far, probably, as the Columbia river. Owing to stress of weather the flag-ship put back and went into port for repairs and to await the return of her consort. In his subsequent report to the Viceroy of New Spain, Don Gaspar de Zúñiga, Conde de Monterey, in whose honor Viscaino named the bay, the latter says he put into the port of Francisco. Hence it is supposed by many persons that he sailed through the Golden Gate. In my opinion, it is more than probable that he sought shelter in Sir Francis Drake's bay, or Bodega bay. Had he discovered the great harbor, Viscaino, who describes so enthusiastically the harbor of San Diego, and even Monterey bay, assuredly would have mentioned it with all due praise. Moreover, one of the objects of Viscaino's search being the strait of Anian, then and for long years afterwards believed to connect the waters of the two great oceans, had he entered the bay of San Francisco he would have explored it thoroughly and would have ascended one of the two rivers emptying into it, if not both of them, until the cessation of tidal influence had convinced him that they were not arms of the sea. I think that the General, deceived by the trend of the coast in the immediate neighborhood of the Golden Gate, which at the time he sailed by it was, quite probably, concealed in a fog bank, or frightened, perhaps, by a near approach in bad weather to the Farallones, went on his way not even dreaming of the existence of San Francisco bay—just as, a few years before that time, Francis Drake went by unknowing. In his booty-laden ship Drake had no stomach for his usual pastime of a fight against odds, for at home in England was not Elizabeth awaiting greedily her share of the spoils of the subjects of

a king with whom she was ostensibly at peace? Fearing to attempt the homeward passage around Cape Horn, where, probably, his enemies lay in wait against his return, Sir Francis sailed northward in search of that same strait of Anian. Had Drake entered the bay of San Francisco can it be doubted that he would have examined it thoroughly, and that he would have ascended one or both of the two rivers? I do not think there can be any doubt on the subject. The last great viking careened his ship where afterward Viscaino's ship lay awaiting the return of its consort, either in Bodega bay or that which to-day bears the rover's name. There he saw the animals like conies, of which his merry chaplain—in those brave days of old Englishman as well as Spaniard put on the cloak of religion when he became a murderer and a thief—has left us an account, and there, in the name of his royal mistress and co-partner in piracy, he took possession of "New Albion" with a delightfully cool and utterly English disregard of others' rights—which, moreover, did not die out when Sir Francis Drake found his grave under the waters of the Caribbean. Not finding the sought-for strait, and just then preferring ingots of gold and pieces of eight to fighting, the freebooter took the only alternative left to him and, boldly launching westward, completed a voyage around the world.

Viscaino's letter is addressed, if I remember aright—for I have not the authorities by me—to the regent of Spain. The spelling of the letter is not more peculiar than that of almost all the Spanish MSS. of the 16th century—for in 1602 the General was somewhat advanced in years, and had learned his rudiments long before then. It has always seemed strange to me that bad spelling could occur in writing Spanish, a language in which every letter is pronounced and always has the same sound, but our General was not a man of letters, and misplaces his "c," and his "s," and his "z," impartially; while, as to his "h," he uses it after the manner of a cockney. To be sure, the sound of that letter in Spanish is a mere breathing, less than the aspirate of the Greeks, a mere suspicion of sound. Viscaino was a bluff sailor, who loved not clerkish ways; he did not even take the trouble to read what he had written, for not infrequently he has omitted a necessary word or two, and once has repeated his words. All Spanish writing of Viscaino's time is full of words abbreviated in the most extraordinary manner, and the abbreviations, even of the same writer in the same MS., are rarely twice alike. One of these astonishing chirographic "tours-de-force" is noticeable in the veritable anagram with which the last line of the letter ends. And those rare old penmen had a pleasing way of writing two, or three, or six of these contorted words as though they all made one single word. Nor is there any attempt at punctuation in this letter. Comparatively speaking, it is easy to decipher the handwriting of Visciano, but some Spanish MSS. of the period involve a great deal of study in the reading thereof. On the whole, I have thought it better to prefix to the translation of the letter a paraphrase, as literally as can be gramatically written, for the use of those not having time or patience to master the original.

A word, in conclusion, about Viscaino's ships. I can not indicate in

single English words just what they were. The larger of the two was a "barcoluengo," or "barcolongo," a vessel having a flush-deck, only one mast, and a very round prow—probably behaving very badly in going about in a head sea or in working to windward. The "lancha" was smaller and had but one mast, while sweeps aided in the propulsion of the vessel, which was a tender to the flag-ship, and very useful in the exploration of shoal waters and narrow passages.

#### THE LETTER.

Ya Vuestra Alteza habrá tenido noticia como el conde de Monterey, Virey de la Nueva España, en conformidad de las órdenes que de Su Magestad tiene, me encargó el descubrimiento de los puertos i paisés de la costa de la mar del sur, desde el puerto de Acapulco al cabo Mendocino, dandome para ello dos navíos—una lancha i un barcolongo—con gente de mar i guerra, armas i municiones, con bastimentos para once meses; que, en conformidad de las órdenes que para ello me dió, salí de Acapulco á cinco de Mayo del año; que he venido haciendo el dicho descubrimiento, aunque con mucha dificultad i trabajo por no ser sabido la navegacion i habiendo siempre los vientos contrarios, mal ayudado de dios i del buen deseo que siempre he tenido de servir á Su Magestad. He descubierto muchos puertos, bahías ó islas hasta el puerto de Monterey, puerto en altura de treinta i siete grados, demarcando todo i sondando, con su derrotero como lo pide el arte de la mar, sin dejar cosa sustancial que de ello i de lo que muestra prometer la tierra i la mucha gente que en ella hay. Envío copia al dicho conde para que la envíe á Su Magestad i á Vuestra Alteza. Lo que es este puerto de Monterey—demas de estar en tan buena altura para lo que Su Magestad pretende para amparo i seguridad de los naos que vienen de Filipinas, en el pueden redimir la necesidad que trujeren, porque tiene gran suma de pinales para árboles i entenas, aunque sea navío de mil toneladas, encinos i robles muy grandes para fabricar navíos, i esto junto á la marina aguadela (sic) en cantidad. I el puerto es muy seguro de todos los vientos. La tierra está toda poblada de Indios i es muy fértil i es del temple i terruño de Castilla, i se dará en ella cualquier semilla que se sembrara. Hay grandes dehesas i muchos géneros de animales i aves—como en la dicha relacion se contiene.

Yo aviso á Su Magestad del grandor de este reyno, i lo gran poblado está, i lo mucho que promete, i lo que los Indios me han dado á entender hay en la tierra adentro de poblaciones, i como la gente es mansa i afable que con facilidad entiendo recibiran el santo evangelio i se reduciran á la corona real—i pues Su Magestad es señor i dueño de todo, que provee en ello lo que mas convenga; que lo que fuere de mi parte le serviré con fidelidad hasta morir.

Respecto de haberme detenido mas tiempo del que se entendió para hacer este descubrimiento: Por las dificultades que tengo dichas se me ha gastado la mayor parte de los bastimentos i municiones que se me caeron, i con el mucho trabajo que la gente ha tenido ha enfermado alguna cantidad

i muertose algunos; de manera que, para hacer el dicho descubrimiento de una vez, así del cabo Mendocino como de la ensenada de Californias, que es la órden que traigo—se me ofreció dificultad para poder de ello hacer todo sin mucho socorro de bastimentos, gente i municiones, i así despacho para ello. Que al almirante dé aviso el dicho conde, pidiendole lo necesario i advirtiendole en que parage i á que tiempo me lo ha de enviar, con la relacion, demarcacion i derroteros, i todo lo que he hecho an el dicho descubrimiento hasta hoy, para que la envíe Vuestra Alteza me lo enviare. Espero en dios de hacer un gran servicio á Su Magestad i llevaré descubierto grandes reynos i riqueza. De todo lo que se fuere haciendo en las ocasiones que se ofrecieren avisaré de ello á Vuestra Alteza con verdad i fidelidad. Guarde nuestro señor á Vuestra Alteza, como el cristian ha menester, i yo soy criado de Vuestra Alteza.

Puerto de Monterey, á 28 de Diciembre de 1602.

(Signed)

SEBASTIAN VISCAINO.

(flourish)

[Translation of the above—which I have made as literal as possible, but always endeavoring to retain the manly, straightforward style of the original.]

Your Highness will have had notice already of how the Count of Monterey, Viceroy of New Spain,\* in conformity with the orders which he has from His Majesty, charged me with the exploration of the harbors and countries of the coast of the south sea from the port of Acapulco to Cape Mendocino, giving me for that purpose two vessels, a lancha and a barco-longo, together with seamen and soldiers, arms and ammunition, and provisions for eleven months; that, in accordance with the orders given to me for that end, I sailed from Acapulco on the 5th day of May of this year; that I have prosecuted said exploration, although with great difficulty and labor, because the navigation was unknown and head-winds were constant, while the aid of providence and the good desire I have ever felt for serving His Majesty availed me little. I have discovered many ports, bays and islands, as far as the port of Monterey, a port which is in thirty-seven degrees of latitude, surveying all and sounding and noting the sailing directions, according to the art of navigation, without neglecting any substantial thing concerning the same, and what the land and the numerous peoples dwelling therein seemingly promise. I send a copy to the said Count, in order that he may transmit the information to His Majesty and Your Highness.† As to what this port of Monterey is, in addition to being so well situated in point of latitude, for that which His Majesty intends to

\* New Spain was the viceroyalty of which the city of Mexico was capital, and included the territory to the northward of the viceroyalty which ultimately became that of Guatemala. Between these two viceroyalties disputes about jurisdiction over the border districts were fierce and frequent. These disputes became national heir-looms, and I do not know whether it has been yet settled definitely whether the district of Soconusco is Mexican or Guatemalan.

† According to Spanish custom, Viscaino sent copies of his report, etc., to the imperial authorities as well as to the viceroy under whose immediate orders he acted.

do for the protection and security of ships coming from the Phillipines.\* In it they may repair the damages which they may have sustained, for there is a great extent of pine forest from which to obtain masts and yards, even though the vessel be of a thousand tons burthen, live oaks† and white oaks for ship-building, and this close to the seaside‖ in great quantities. And the harbor is very secure against all winds. The land is thickly peopled by Indians and is very fertile, in its climate and the quality of the soil resembling Castile, and any seed sown there will give fruit. There are extensive lands fit for pasturage, and many kinds of beasts and birds—as is set forth in the report referred to.

I call his Majesty's attention to the great extent of this land and its numerous population, and what promise it holds forth, and what the Indians have given me to understand concerning the population of the interior, and how gentle and affable the people is, so that they will receive readily the holy gospel and will come into subjection to the royal crown; and, since His Majesty is lord and master of all, let him provide as may seem best to him. As to what it behooves me to do on my part, I will serve him till death.

With regard to my having delayed longer than the time which was thought necessary for this exploration: Because of the many difficulties of which I have spoken, the greater part of the provisions and ammunition which were furnished to me has been expended; while, owing to the great labors which my crews have gone through, a number of the men have fallen ill and some have died; so that for making farther exploration at once, as well of the region of Cape Mendocino as of the entire littoral¶ of the Californias, as is called for by my orders, I have met with obstacles to the completion of the work without considerable succor in the way of provisions, people and ammunition, and speedy dispatch of these. Let the Admiral be advised by the said Count of this, he asking him for what is necessary, and letting him know to what place and at what time he must dispatch these things to me, sending to him also the map, report and sailing directions concerning all that I have done in said exploration to the present time, so that Your Highness may order that the same may be sent to me. I trust in

\* There was but one ship a year between the American and the Asian Indies of Spain, the vessel plying between Acapulco and Manila. On her home passage from the latter port the galeon ran across the Pacific with the trade-wind and made a landfall on our coast about the latitude of Monterey. The chief pilot of Viscaino's ship had been wrecked, only a few years before the time of the voyage I am considering, in the galeon which was cast away on this coast a little to the northward of San Francisco. According to well founded tradition, a boat from another of these packets, which foundered at sea, conveyed a woman, a priest and several other Spaniards to one of the Sandwich Islands, where they were kindly received and intermarried among the islanders.

† In all Spanish-American countries the "encino" is the "live-oak; in Mexico the Spanish word "roble" is applied to the "white oak" especially, though the word is applied to all oaks other than the "encino."

‖ Viscaino's words are: "La marina aguadela." There is no word "aguadela" in the Spanish language. "Aguadero" is a deposit of water. There is a tendency in the provincialisms of Spain to interchange the "l" and the "r"—just as there is also among our own children, among Chinese speaking English and among Sandwich Islanders using their own tongue. By "la marina aguadela" Viscaino may have meant to say, literally, "the marine watering-place," but I have thought it as well to render the phrase by our word "sea-side."

¶ The word in the text is "ensenada," and our word having the same meaning is "bight." Evidently the word can not be literally translated here, and, to express the idea of the whole coast from Cape San Lucas to Cape Mendocino, I select the word I use.

God that I may render a great service to His Majesty and that I may discover great kingdoms and riches. Of all that may be done I shall advise Your Highness, as opportunity may serve, with truth and faithfully. May our Lord guide Your Highness—which is a ward so necessary to the Christian\* and I remain the servant of Your Highness.

Port of Monterey, 28th December, 1602.

[Signed]: SEBASTIAN VISCAINO.  
(flourish)

Translated by me at Los Angeles, this 7th day of February, 1889—the paraphrase of the original, and the historical introduction and notes also being by me.

GEO. BUTLER GRIFFIN.

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\* Viscaino says: "Como la cristian ha menester." If the regent were a woman, then only the final "a" of "cristiana" has been dropped; otherwise the sentence is such as no Spaniard, however careless or illiterate, would write. However it be, "necessary to the Christian" answers to any possible reading of the original, whether the regent were man or woman. In the history of Spain, by the way, that a regent acted for the sovereign does not imply, as it might in those of other countries, the minority or incapacity of that sovereign. During the reigns of the Emperor and of Philip II, Spain was not infrequently directly governed by a regent, the monarch being absent. Both Charles and his son were fond of putting this power in the hands of female relatives. The Queen of Hungary represented Charles at different times; and his sister, the Duchess of Parma, as regent for the Low Countries, was not so bad a ruler as Philip himself.

